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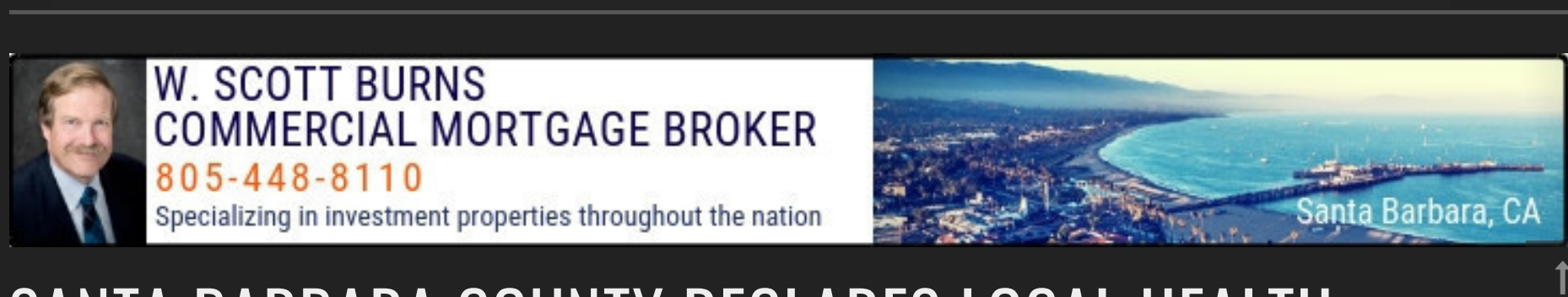
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SANTA BARBARA COUNTY DECLARES LOCAL HEALTH EMERGENCY IN RESPONSE TO NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

Santa Barbara County Declares Local Health Emergency in Response to Novel Coronavirus

NEWS REPORT / MAR 12 2020 08:03 PM / BYEDHAT STAFF / 16 COMMENTS / READS 2825

Press conference held by Public Health Department officials (Screenshot: KEYT News)

By edhat staff

Santa Barbara County officials held an impromptu press conference to declare a Local Health Emergency in response to novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

On Thursday evening, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department declared the emergency in response to an increased spread of COVID-19 across the country and the Governor of California's Declared State of Emergency and mass gathering guidance.

There are currently no confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in Santa Barbara County.

The Office of Emergency Management has been activated and is monitoring a phone line for the community to call in with questions at 833-688-5551.

SOCIAL DISTANCING MANDATE

An order has been issued mandating social distancing effective immediately until March 30 within Santa Barbara County. The decision was made based on the World Health Organization classifying COVID-19 as a pandemic and the recommendations from the California Department of Public Health to delay rates of transmission, illness, and death, said Dr. Van Do-Reynoso, Director of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (PHD).

The social distancing mandate creates firm parameters on public gatherings resulting in the cancellation or postponement of non-essential gatherings. Social distancing refers to a conscious effort to reduce close contact between people and hopefully slow community transmission of the virus. National health professionals vary in how strict social distancing should be but in general, it's reducing contact with other people if you don't have any symptoms. If you do have symptoms of any kind, self-quarantine. The Atlantic tackles this topic with a variety of questions and answers from health officials.

Large gatherings of 250 people or more are to be cancelled or postponed while small gatherings if they need to occur, should allow for social distancing. Individuals who are high risk, those over 60 years old, have an underlying health condition, and/or have a compromised immune system, should not attend events or gatherings with ten or more people, said Dr. Henning Ansorg,
Santa Barbara County Public Health Officer.

COVID-19 TESTING

While there are zero cases of confirmed COVID-19 in Santa Barbara County, 9 individuals are currently being monitored as recent travelers by the PHD. They are self-isolated in their home under PHD supervision for 14 days monitoring any symptoms such as fever, shortness of breath, cough, etc. After 14 days without symptoms, the travelers will be released from self-isolation.

PHD has tested 6 individuals, 5 of those located in South County, who met certain criteria for testing. These individuals have tested negative. Altogether PHD has monitored 61 individuals for potential COVID-19 but all results have been negative.

As of Thursday morning, California has 198 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 4 deaths.

Testing has been expanded statewide with 17 active labs in Calfornia including locations in San Luis Obispo and Ventura Counties. Two commercial labs, Lab Corps and Quest Diagnostics, have additionally come on board.

PHD stressed the importance that not everyone will be tested, certain criteria needs to be met for testing to be considered and it will not be offered on request. Those who pose a greater risk such as having a chronic medical condition, lung disease, heart disease, are over 60 years old, or congregate settings like skilled nursing facilties, will be prioritized.

For those who don't meet the criteria but are having symptoms, it's important to self-quarantine and contact a physician.

SCHOOLS REMAIN OPEN

Santa Barbara County schools decided to cancel or postpone non-essential travel and events for students and staff through at least the remainder of March. Classrooms will remain open, according to the Santa Barbara County Education Office.

"With the recent guidance from the California Department of Public Health, our Santa Barbara County public schools are united in our approach to cancel or postpone large events and those that cannot accommodate social distancing," said Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools Susan Salcido. "School itself is an essential gathering and will continue unless the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department gives direction otherwise. Each school district is carefully balancing the importance of public health with the need for students to learn and be provided with continued school supports."

LOCAL BUSINESSES

The county is working on a guideline of procedures for local businesses and restaurants so they can continue to operate while practicing social distancing.

Additionally, officials are planning to install 12 handwashing stations in various locations throughout the county. More information is expected to be released tomorrow on these measures.

For more information visit the Public Health Department's COVID-19 Public Information Portal at https://publichealthsbc.org/

The full press conference is available below courtesy of KEYT News:

Santa Barbara County Public Health officials hold coronavirus briefing

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LOCALINSB MAR 13, 2020 03:41 AM

Irony is Free Coronavirus testing will pass in Congress today. But we don't have the chemicals to run the tests. Meanwhile the WH's very stable genius is tweeting that all of this is the fault of the CDC while we have members of Congress who can't get tested. Let's face it, we have clowns (sycophants of the very stable genius) running the government and major institutions and they are driving us off a cliff with the help of that very stable genius.

MIDAIR MAR 12, 2020 11:15 PM

In other news, Sarah Palin was rapping "Baby got back" in a bear suit. This apocalypse sure is weird.

JFC723 MAR 12, 2020 11:09 PM

Work hours have already been cut significantly for many in the county. They will keep schools open until its too late. Just one more week till spring break. In my opinion its well worth it closing them down. Moving too slow against a fast moving pandemic.

LOCAL321 MAR 13, 2020 06:29 AM

I realize there are no perfect answers here, but one downside of closing schools—particularly elementary schools, which typically don't have the online option that higher education campuses do—is that parents, in many cases, won't be able to afford or find enough childcare, thus offloading some of the task to grandparents, who are much more vulnerable to the virus than kids are. And with schools being closed, many kids will still get together. They just will. So, if they are going to be together anyway, and they generally aren't as susceptible to coronavirus, why not leave the schools open so parents can actually work (from home, if possible), thus avoiding the spread to grandparents? Apparently, Britain isn't closing schools, citing this as one of the reasons.

SBCOUNTYLOCAL MAR 12, 2020 10:40 PM

China had fever clinics. Before entering buildings or using mass transportation people's temperature were taken. If you had a temperature you were taken to a fever clinic. You're tested for the flu. You have CT scans and a Coronavirus testing if necessary. It took approximately 4 hours. If you tested positive you were placed in a gymnasium or other location with other people who it tested positive and then monitored by doctors and nurses. You didn't go back and infect your family. They found that 70-80% of infections were due to living situations. We cannot self isolate unless we live alone. What are the plans for Santa Barbara? You have to understand that in many areas of town we have multiple people living in one bedroom. It's unimaginable to believe that we are going to be able to have quarantines for entire families. People will infect the people they live with. We need a better plan. If we don't have one the economy will crater as will our health system. We need leadership and a sound plan that removes the threat of community spread and takes care of our residents.

STEWART14 MAR 13, 2020 01:38 AM

Good call, however the last CT scan I had nearly put me on the streets. With my $6000 deductible I owed $3500 for that one scan.

MARATHONER MAR 12, 2020 10:25 PM

Coronavirus is in SB County, probably, in the opinion of the expert, in response to Supervisor Hartmann. The article is correct that there are no confirmed cases in the county, but I did not find the line that reported that expert opinion. It is there on the video at the county website but I don't have time to do the research to find the exact time, at the moment anyhow. But it is worth watching the whole thing - at least twice. Good fairly comprehensive report overall this is not intended as a criticism just an additional fact for the record. Otherwise false optimism gets a boost.

A-1584106217 MAR 12, 2020 11:01 PM

On Tuesday, Dr. Fisk of Cottage Hospital gave his OPINION that the virus has been here for a few weeks. He stressed it was only an opinion. It was reported in both Noozhawk and the Independent.

MTNDRIVER MAR 12, 2020 10:18 PM

Keeping life as normal as possible for kids is important to their wellbeing. I hope they're able to keep the schools open til the worst of this is over.

EASTBEACH MAR 12, 2020 11:03 PM

While I appreciate the sentiment, it's interesting to note that in the Lake Washington School District in beleaguered King County (Seattle), a petition to close the schools was started by *students*. It was the idea of an eighth grader who didn't want to spread the COVID-19 to his family. The district decided not to close their schools. I'm not necessarily saying that was a wrong or right decision. But some of these kids know what's at stake (see WaPo link in earlier post).

MARATHONER MAR 12, 2020 10:40 PM

No disrespect, but keeping life as normal as possible would entail teaching that "this is an especially tough time for everybody" and "things are not always like this". And anything done for the purpose of preserving normalcy must be subordinate to preventing suffering from horrible diseases. For instance, "normal" visits to grandmother, or "normal" wiping snot from one's nose things like that will be definitel not in the normal mode. But of course this is what you mean by as normal "as possible". Just, people will not agree on where to draw the line. Nobody wants to put someone else's grandad at risk just so their kids have a nice normal time. I hope.

EASTBEACH MAR 12, 2020 09:55 PM

The decision to keep schools open or closed is a tough one. A double-edged sword .... https://www.npr.org/2020/03/11/814438424/when-should-schools-close-for-coronavirus https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/03/09/is-it-really-good-idea-close-schools-fight-coronavirus/

A-1584106217 MAR 12, 2020 09:08 PM

I hope schools will remain open. Keep the kids in their small classroom settings as much as possible. Don't have assemblies, all school recess, etc. I think this could be a controlled environment and will keep the kids safer than closing and sending them into households that might not abide by the recommendations.

MARATHONER MAR 12, 2020 10:32 PM

Interesting. Risk assessments are given in strata with increased risk at 60-70, more at 70-80, etcetera. Kids do carry and spread quite a bit of germs, afaik more so than older people. So that poses a heightened risk of teachers becoming infected. Whether or not kids have a greater level of viral infectivity overall than older people is a very interesting question. In other words, is the general characteristic that kids tend to carry and spread quite a few bugs going to also manifest with respect to the COVID19 virus? Will teachers, who are not likely to be masked up in N95 - unlike health care workers - become a conspicuous vector? A bitter pill but the reality on the ground will be what it is regardless of the upvote/downvote popularity contest. #morethanmerelyinconvenientruth

BIRD MAR 12, 2020 10:26 PM

Children are thought to be safe from the coronavirus, although they can be vectors, but what about the teachers?

A-1584106217 MAR 12, 2020 09:36 PM

Agree! Also keeps parents working and able to support the family.

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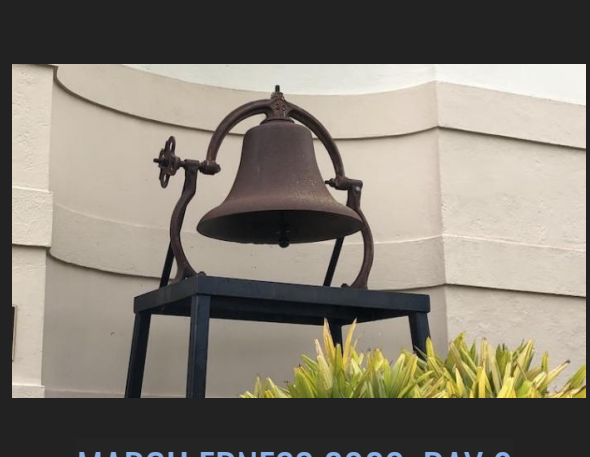
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